

CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND YOU:

HOW THE UNITED STATES ARMY CONDUCTS
LOGISTICAL WITHDRAWALS AFTER LENGTHY
OPERATIONS

A Monograph



by

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ABSTRACT

CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND YOU: HOW THE UNITED STATES ARMY COMDUCTS LOGISTICAL WITHDRAWALS AFTER LENGTHY OPERATIONS, by MAJ Bryan J. Fencil, 48 pages.

Through experience gained in the withdrawals from Vietnam and Iraq, the United States Army has developed a system of redeployment that can guide future withdrawals from large scale, lengthy overseas contingency operations. The elements of this system include establishing property accountability, echeloning of sustainment support, and reconstituting the force. This study compares Army operations during the withdrawal from the Vietnam War and from Iraq at the conclusion of OPERATIONS IRAQI FREEDOM and NEW DAWN. It argues that planning for the withdrawal of forces is a critical component of operational planning and must be viewed as the final act of any campaign.

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ACRONYMS

AAR	After Action Review
ADP	Army Doctrinal Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrinal Reference Publication
AO	Area of Operations
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BSB	Brigade Support Battalion
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CONUS	Continental United States
COSCOM	Corps Support Command
CSSB	Combat Sustainment Support Battalion
C2	Command and Control
ESC	Expeditionary Sustainment Command
FM	Field Manual
OCNUS	Outside the Continental United States
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
NCA	National Command Authority
RCAAT	Reverse Collection and Analysis Team
SB	Sustainment Brigade
TAACOM	Theater Army Command
TSC	Theater Sustainment Command

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INTRODUCTION

The task ahead is great. The effects of the war will play out for years. At the Army level, we will struggle to reset equipment and personnel long after the last truck or Soldier arrives home. Gaining accountability of property accountability will take an Army wide effort.

LTG Mitchell Stevenson, *Army Sustainment*

As the United States Army approaches its impending withdrawal from Afghanistan, a question remains, has the United States developed a way to withdraw materiel logistically from a theater of operations? The Vietnam War was the first conflict in which United States forces conducted combat operations while simultaneously withdrawing from the theater of operations. The United States did not conduct a similar operation until withdrawing its forces from Iraq in 2011. Both exits proved challenging and presented similar issues. Specifically, logisticians faced the mammoth challenge of reestablishing property accountability and supply discipline after almost a decade of war. Colonel Catherine Reese, the deputy director of supply for the Department of the Army G-4, noted in October 2011 that over two years the Army had successfully reestablished accountability of 1.8 billion items valued in excess of \$3.4 billion.¹ Implied, but not stated, was that the Army had previously lost accountability of these items, and an untold number more. As the United States faces its exit from Afghanistan beginning in 2014 we must question whether these long wars are indeed the way of the future. If that is the case, does United States Army's history with leaving theaters after lengthy operations offer insights on how best to accomplish these disengagements in the future?

The withdrawal of forces from a theater must be accomplished in such a way as to support follow-on operations or a renewal of combat. The arraignment of tactical actions in time

¹Michelle Tan, "Army Eyes Soldiers' Help In Gear Record-Keeping," *Army Times*, October 11, 2012, <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2012/10/army-seeks-soldiers-help-in-record-keeping-for-gear-101112/> (Accessed October 11, 2012).

space and purpose in order to achieve a strategic aim is the goal of the operational artist.² In order to accomplish this, forces must be aligned against tasks with sufficient combat power to accomplish their missions. However, operations do not occur in a vacuum. Resources and troops available will always be limited. Planners must recognize that forces used for a specific operation will be required for a follow on campaign, either within their area of responsibility or in another. How to plan for the deliberate disengagement of forces while in contact is therefore a crucial element of operational planning and must be viewed as the final act of any campaign.

An examination of how the United States Army has conducted withdrawal operations in the past is necessary to establish if an American way to withdraw exists. Examining the withdrawals from Vietnam and Iraq for evidence on how the Army first conducted this task and later conducted a similar mission will provide a basis for establishing common parameters. The withdrawal from Vietnam began in 1969 and ended in 1973. In the intervening years, political decisions more than tactical action drove the redeployment timeline. A similar situation occurred in Iraq, when a political decision dictated the date of departure for United States forces operating in that country. The monograph will therefore be organized into five chapters: chapter one- introduction, chapter two- historiography, chapter three- Vietnam analysis, chapter four- Iraq analysis and chapter five- conclusion with recommendations for future operations. This study will focus solely on logistical issues. It will not look at the provisioning or withdrawal of health service support functions except in ancillary instances.

This study will illustrate that the United States Army has developed a system of redeployment based on its experience in withdrawing from Vietnam and Iraq that can guide future redeployments from large scale, lengthy overseas contingency operations. The elements of

²Department of the Army, *Unified Land Operations ADP 3-0* (Washington: Department of the Army, 2011) 9.

this system include establishing property accountability, echeloning of sustainment support as the force withdraws, and resetting/reconstituting the force.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Redeployment is the preparation for and movement of forces (units), manpower (individuals), and materiel from an AO to follow-on designated CONUS or OCONUS bases, usually after the combatant commander has achieved conditions favorable to US interests or as directed by the NCA. The key to redeployment is that it should not be considered as retrograde movement, but in fact as a new deployment. Redeployment must involve force integrity so that units may be diverted anywhere, ready to fight.

FM 100-17, 1992.

When faced with a challenging mission, planners often conduct research to determine if parallels may be drawn from historical examples. Doctrinal publications, especially older ones, often address the situation well. Although a single resource covering the logistical withdraw of forces while in contact does not exist, other works address the issues in pieces. Works relevant to this study are categorized here as doctrinal publications, written works on the withdrawal from Vietnam, and works covering the withdrawal from Iraq. Guiding principles from these collected works can better focus the Army's efforts in future withdrawals.

Doctrinal Publications

The doctrine on withdraw is not concentrated within a single volume. It is instead addressed in several separate areas. Doctrinal publications that informed this study can be divided into two broad categories. The first covers the warfighting function of sustainment and its sub functions specific to logistics. Included in this category are specific manuals on redeployment, retrograde and reconstitution. The second broad category includes publications specific to headquarters and logistics commands with responsibilities for conducting withdrawals.

Doctrine on Withdrawal Tasks

Tasks related to the sustainment warfighting function fall within the purview of *Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 4-0 Sustainment*, the Army's capstone manual on all aspects of

logistics. The September 2012 version of *ADP 4-0*, and its accompanying *Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 4-0*, are the first publications to use the term “Theater Closing” to encapsulate all the tasks associated with the redeployment of troops and exit from a theater of operations. It defines the idea therefore as “the process of redeploying Army forces and equipment from a theater, the drawdown and removal or disposition of Army non-unit equipment and materiel, and the transition of materiel and facilities back to host nation or civil authorities.”³ This concept is, like most concepts in military art and science, merely an evolution of past ideas viewed through the lens of recent contemporary experiences. As is the case for any new introduction of doctrine, this doctrinal update will leave in its wake a series of related publications that while still valid, are now less clearly applicable. Many of these publications are the field manuals that detail the specific actions related to the conduct of a withdrawal.

The latest field manual addressing these sub-tasks is *Field Manual 3-35, Army Deployment and Redeployment*. *FM 3-3* is the current Army doctrine for deployment and redeployment. It defines redeployment as “an operational move critical in reestablishing force readiness.”⁴ The overall focus of this document is on actions at the unit level that support the physical movement of personnel and equipment. The discussion on the planning required of logistics forces to support redeployment is overly simplified and limited to less than one paragraph. Withdraw of forces while in contact is not covered at all.

Prior to the publication of *FM 3-35*, the concepts of movement were addressed in the 1992 *FM 100-17, Mobilization, Deployment, Redeployment and Demobilization*. The chapter devoted to redeployment is a concise depiction of strategic movement coupled with specific unit

³Department of the Army, *Army Doctrinal Publication 4-0 Army Sustainment* (Washington: Department of the Army: 2012), 13.

⁴Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-35 Army Deployment and Redeployment* (Washington: Department of the Army, 2010), 5-1.

tasks. It refers to units key to the redeployment process that no longer exist in the Army's organization, such as material management centers. It further states that "Redeployments during Vietnam, Operation Just Cause, and numerous training exercises featured C2 [command and control] organizations provided by the corps, whose charter was to assist the logistics organization (TAACOM [theater army command], COSCOM [corps support command]) and get units home."⁵ While many of the concepts discussed in the work are outdated it does charge the reader to remember that the desired end state after redeployment is the restoration of the Army's capability to conduct future operations.⁶

Specifically addressing issues of redeploying units *FM 100-17-5, Redeployment*, last updated in 1996, was dedicated solely to issues involving the movement of forces either to home station or to another area of operations. It offers a well-stated purpose for the actions taken during redeployment.

Although many of the considerations for redeployment correspond to those for a deployment, there are differences. During deployment, elements of a unit are configured for strategic movement with the ultimate goal of reassembling the elements into an effective force in the theater. During redeployment, unless the unit is redeploying to a new theater, the goal is to move forces home rather than building a force for theater operations. Therefore, redeployment preparation involves re-establishing unit integrity and accountability of personnel and equipment.⁷

FM 100-17-5 also discusses the necessity of planning activities to reestablish readiness levels, and conduct reconstitution actions. The limitation in this document, like others of its time and since, is that it assumes a condition of conflict termination. During the withdrawal from Vietnam,

⁵Headquarters, Department of the Army. *FM 100-17 Mobilization, Deployment, Redeployment and Demobilization* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1992) 5-6. TAACOM was the acronym for Theater Area Army Command, COSCOM was the Corps Support Command.

⁶*Ibid.*, 5-9.

⁷Headquarters, Department of the Army, *FM 100-17-5 Redeployment* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1996), 4-3.

U.S. forces remained in contact with the enemy and engaged in ongoing combat operations.

Likewise in Iraq, once OPERATION NEW DAWN replaced OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM as the framework for operations, the daily conditions for operations between the two phases remained largely identical. Conditions on the ground during the combat of IRAQI FREEDOM bore striking similarity to that of the advisory period of NEW DAWN.

Throughout operations in Iraq, the Army began to reconstitute its forces as they left theater and began to prepare to return to the combat theater. The requirement to reconstitute units was foreseen during the cold war but not doctrinally addressed since that time. *FM 100-9, Reconstitution*, dates to 1992 and is a product of AirLand Battle doctrine. It remains an active Field Manual. *FM 100-9* details the steps to regenerate combat power after extensive attrition by enemy forces. This document relates to the issue of in theater reconstitution, and does not assume a cessation of hostilities. However, its processes may be viewed as outdated and do not bear any resemblance to operations undertaken either in Iraq or Vietnam.⁸

Doctrine on Responsible Organizations

Two organizations share the responsibility for tasks associated with removing units and equipment from a theater of operations- the Theater Army and the Theater Sustainment Command (TSC). *FM 3-93, Theater Army Operations*, provides the Army's doctrine on the Theater Army Headquarters. Title 10 of the United States Code specifies that each individual Service retain their responsibilities for sustainment. *FM 3-93* further expands that "the theater and expeditionary sustainment commands are the theater army's principle executors of the

⁸Headquarters, Department of the Army, *FM 100-9 Reconstitution* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1992).

sustainment mission.”⁹ Aspects of redeployment such as accountability of property can therefore be juxtaposed alongside mobilization and deployment tasks as a service responsibility.

FM 4-94, Theater Sustainment Command, is the doctrinal reference for the Theater Sustainment Command, the senior logistical headquarters for a geographic combatant command’s area of responsibility. Tasks normally associated with a TSC include conducting reception, staging, onward movement, and integration, distribution management, material management, providing sustainment, supporting special operations forces support and conducting redeployment.¹⁰ This document comes closest to providing definitive guidance on how to conduct logistical withdraws from a theater of operation. Even this, however, is limited to but six paragraphs. The challenge in conducting and supporting redeployment operations is stated clearly as complicated by two main factors.

First, the same elements that operate and manage the intratheater distribution system during deployment and sustainment operations perform similar roles during redeployment. When *redemption and deployment/sustaining operations occur simultaneously* (emphasis added), the TSC may find it necessary to rebalance its forces or change the missions of subordinate organizations in order to effectively support simultaneous operations.

Second, requirements vary widely depending on the scale and scope of redeployment operations, theater infrastructure, and other METT-TC considerations. For example, redeployment operations may range from personnel only to entire units and their equipment. Depending upon the political/military strategy, unit rotations may occur while decisive operations continue unabated or during operational transitions. Key TSC considerations include but are not limited to: size of the force redeploying/deploying; infrastructure requirements/limitations; security requirements; traffic circulation; staging areas; distribution system capacity; competing requirements for available resources; quantities of supplies and materiel to be redistributed; agricultural inspections; and establishing and maintaining accountability of retrograde cargo. The challenge, for the TSC, is effective coordination and synchronization, vertically and horizontally, to ensure

⁹Headquarters, Department of the Army, *FM 3-93 Theater Army Operations* (Washington: Department of the Army, 2011), 1-3.

¹⁰Headquarters, Department of the Army, *FM 4-94 Theater Sustainment Command* (Washington: Department of the Army. 2010), 4-1

responsive simultaneous support to not only on-going sustainment operations throughout the theater but also redeployment.¹¹

This statement is the first instance where the conduct of redeployment operations while simultaneously supporting decisive operation is mentioned in doctrine. The document also clearly places the TSC at the head of coordinating all elements of withdrawal operations. It is important to note that by the time of this document's publication in 2010, the Army was well into the planning for the withdrawal from Iraq and had successfully rotated units into and out of the theater for several years. This represents an evolutionary progression of doctrine related to withdrawals resulting from a decade of experience in Iraq. However the Iraq withdrawal was predated by the Army's experience in Vietnam.

Vietnam Withdrawal Resources

A wealth of sources document the planning and execution of the military withdrawal from Vietnam. This information is not centrally located and remains mostly in primary source material. The code name KEYSTONE identifies the group of operations that orchestrated the drawdown of army units in Vietnam. As each major unit redeployed or was inactivated, it completed a detailed after action report (AAR). These KEYSTONE AARs illustrate the challenges associated with major units leaving Vietnam after a lengthy employment, including issues with establishing property accountability as well as the retrograde of equipment.

A typical KEYSTONE AAR details actions taken prior to notification of deployment. While gaining oversight of internal property, the AAR documents also detail efforts to support the United States Army's Vietnam Asset Reconciliation Program (VARP). Accounting for all sensitive items by serial number along with identifying discrepancies with on hand quantities of major end items are common issues. The challenge of re-establishing property accountability

¹¹Ibid., 4-46 , 4-27.

cannot be understated. The results of the 25th Infantry Division's inventories are illustrative of the difficulties involved. The discrepancy between reported and actual on hand quantities exceeded more than 86,000 items. While many of these items were TA-50 (individual clothing and/or equipment), over 2,500 small arms, thirty-four wheeled vehicles and all of the division's aircraft were improperly documented.¹² While not physically lost, the lack of proper accountability for these items complicated redeployment actions and distribution of excess equipment.

Inventories of direct support supply activities also typified actions taken prior to redeployment. Unit AARs also typically describe efforts to establish non-standard or ad-hoc organizations created to provide sustainment support as they redeployed. Typically denoted as Combat Serves Support Battalions (CSSB), these multifunction units provided direct and limited general support to units as they moved through redeployment sites. They provided this support either through organic assets or more typically as time progressed, through contracted services. The turn in of Class IV (barrier and building material) and Class V (ammunition) supplies were a large challenge for units as they prepared for movement.

The Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), Support Command AAR provides analysis of how support was echeloned throughout the drawdown. Each AAR from headquarters through sub-unit level followed a set format covering issues, discussion, and recommendations. The units covered in these later AARs detail the efforts to echelon sustainment support throughout Vietnam, particularly in the period from November 1972 to March 1973 as the United States executed its final withdrawal from Vietnam.

Jeffery Clarke's *Advice and Support: The Final Years 1965-1973*, details the United States effort to withdraw forces from South Vietnam. It focuses on MACV operations to transfer

¹²Headquarters, 25th Infantry Division, "After Action Report- Keystone Bravo," 15 December 1970, F-11.

the war effort to the Vietnamese; commonly referred to as *Vietnamization*. Along with the reduction of combat forces in Vietnam, MACV planned for the drawdown in the U.S. military support infrastructure. An initial plan for the handover of support responsibilities called “Switchback” entailed redeploying U.S. units to hand over their equipment in place to newly activated South Vietnamese forces. This plan proved flawed. The challenge associated with aligning the activation dates of ARVN force with departing U.S. units was too great and MACV decided not to implement the program in total.¹³

Lieutenant General Joseph M Heiser, Jr. served as the commander of the 1st Logistical Command in Vietnam from 1968-1969. In 1972 he authored a special study on Vietnam logistics. It covered logistic operations through 1970. While not fully documenting the withdrawal from Vietnam, it covers the impact of the ongoing reduction in forces. It also analyses the logistical impact of supporting the Vietnam War on both active and reserve component readiness. Since few .reserve units deployed to South Vietnam, they were often last in priority for fielding of new equipment and supply requisitions. As army units left Vietnam and excess equipment returned to the supply system, the reserve formations benefited greatly from the redistribution of property.¹⁴

Iraq Withdrawal Resources

The Iraq withdrawal is not as thoroughly documented as the one from Vietnam. Limited unclassified primary source material is currently available. The majority of available written works are in the form of articles in the *Army Logistician*/*Army Sustainment* journal.¹⁵ Several of

¹³Jeffery Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years 1965-1973* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1988), 427-429.

¹⁴Joseph M. Heiser, *Vietnam Studies: Logistics Support* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1991), v-vii.

¹⁵*Army Logistician* changed names to *Army Sustainment* in 2009. It is the Army's professional bulletin for the sustainment warfighting function, including logistics, personnel

these articles cover operations during the drawdown from the perspective of item managers of individual classes of supply, to the perspectives of general officers on how to properly manage the action and reset the force for continued readiness.

In 2009, Colonel Michael A. Armstead penned a Strategy Research Paper for the U.S. Army War College entitled “The Retrograde of Equipment Out of Iraq.” In it, he summarized the challenge faced by Army planners attempting to wrestle with how to move a decade’s worth of equipment out of Iraq as required by the Status of Forces Agreement. He criticizes the plan in place at that time which was neither detailed nor complete. Armstead also drew comparisons and contrasts between the Vietnam War and Iraq War in terms of the logistical planning and execution of retrograde from those countries. While Armstead’s analysis of the problem is illustrative of the challenges with Iraq, it remains a snapshot, since the detailed planning for withdrawal occurred after he wrote his paper.¹⁶

The Center for Army Lessons Learned and the Sustainment Center of Excellence, Directorate of Lessons Learned at Fort Lee, Virginia, maintains a repository of Reverse Collection and Analysis (RCAAT) briefings, to include transcripts of all presentations to the Commanding General of the United States Army Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM). Initiated in May 2006, the RCAAT program brings commanders and staff officers of recently redeployed logistics organizations to CASCOM in order to update the logistics community on observations, insights, and lessons collected during their deployments.¹⁷ These

services, as well as medical logistics and evacuation.

¹⁶ Colonel Michael A. Armstead, “The Retrograde of Equipment Out of Iraq” (Strategy Research Paper: U.S. Army War College, 2009).

¹⁷ MG Mitchel H. Stevenson, “R–CAATs: Bridging the Information Gap”, *Army Logistician* 40, no 1 (January-February 2008), http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/JanFeb08/rcaat_infogap.html (accessed September 26, 2012).

sessions focus on logistic operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. They include discussions on redeployment and echeloning of sustainment support. AARs from units redeployed from Iraq and specifically from sustainment units show the considerable planning that went into the withdraw beginning in early 2008.

A RCAAT session with the Army Materiel Command detailed the national level planning to support property transactions and reset of returning units. Key areas addressed in this session included the need for a rest task force focused on reconstitution efforts, the need for an organization dedicated to entering returning property into a the reconstitution process and property accountability, especially for contractors. The government furnished contractors throughout Iraq with equipment pursuant to individual performance work statements. As the Army began to withdraw from the Iraq Theater, it quickly became apparent that much of this equipment had become “lost.” That is, unit property books failed to document all equipment in the theater in accordance with army standards. A key finding of Army Materiel Command (AMC) is that accounting for government provided equipment must be a key consideration in future retrogrades.¹⁸

¹⁸R-CAAT Series Army Material Command Operation New Dawn Retrograde and Reset Lessons Learned AAR Presentation Transcript , May 2012, CASCOT Directorate for Lesson Learned / Quality Assurance & Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), 6.

WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM

This is the first time that excess materiel has been identified, screened, and removed from a combat area while the fighting was still in progress

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur T. Buswell, *Army Logistician*, 1973

Background of the Vietnam War

The United States involvement in Vietnam dates back to World War II with the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner to the modern Central Intelligence Agency. Following World War II, the United States focused on preventing the expansion of communism and became supportive of governments that would serve to balance against this growth. While previously supporting French operations, the United States overt involvement against communist in Southeast Asia began in 1954 with the introduction of a military assistance and advisory group to support the fledgling Republic of Vietnam. The U.S. Army's early focus was on building and training the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). By 1960, an insurgency organized by communist leaders in North Vietnam had taken hold in South Vietnam.¹⁹ The U.S. Army advisory mission morphed into a counter-insurgency effort. Subsequently, the number of U.S. military personnel increased from slightly more than 500 in 1960 to over 23,000 by 1964. Increased amounts of materiel also began to arrive along with the added personnel. These increased resources provided superior aviation and intelligence assets meant to bolster the ARVN's mobility and effectiveness as well as providing an expansive support network of airfields and logistics assets for the United States Air Force.²⁰

¹⁹Jeffery J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1988), 7-12.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 13-14.

The United States' involvement in South Vietnam changed dramatically in 1965. With the commitment of North Vietnamese regular Army forces into South Vietnam to support the Viet Cong guerrillas, the government of South Vietnam, never truly stable, appeared to weaken. President Lyndon Johnson chose to commit large numbers of U.S. ground forces to both support the South Vietnamese government and counter the growing numbers of People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) forces operating in the South.²¹

This influx of both troops and fire power staved off collapse of the South Vietnamese government. From 1966-1968, Washington officials held onto the belief that the North Vietnamese would reach a breaking point. The Tet Offensive of 1968, while a tactical defeat for the North Vietnamese, cultivated an idea within the American public that the war was not going well. Subsequently, popular support for the war plummeted. Equating the upcoming presidential election as a referendum on his conduct of the war, Johnson chose not to seek reelection.²²

With diminish support for the war domestically, the new U.S. president, Richard Nixon, saw the Vietnam War as a political liability. Nixon announced the beginning of a withdrawal of American forces in 1969 at a conference on Midway Island. However, he was not giving up on defeating the North Vietnamese or ensuring the survival of South Vietnam. While recognizing the need to interdict supplies from the north, Nixon rejected the option of increased aerial bombardment of North Vietnam as too politically costly. Instead, he ordered the bombing of PAVN supply bases in Cambodia and later a ground incursion across the border.²³

²¹John M. Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign: the 1970 Offensive and America's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 1.

²²Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*, 2.

²³Ibid., 13.

The political fallout for the Nixon Administration from the Cambodian incursion was overwhelmingly negative. Seen as widening the war in Vietnam, Congress moved quickly to limit the President's authority to commit ground troops outside the limits of Vietnam. While these sweeping legislative bills failed to pass, they foreshadowed the War Powers Act of 1973. In an effort to save face, Nixon declared the Cambodian incursion as a great demonstration of successful *Vietnamization* and justification for increased United States withdrawals.²⁴

Due in part to the reduced presence of U.S. ground forces; military leaders in the U.S. anticipated a large offensive in 1972. Inexplicably, the Nixon administration's answer was to speed up the pace of withdraws from Vietnam. By the time of the Easter Offensive, only four U.S. infantry battalions remained in the country. As U.S. troops left, Nixon continued to press for a cessation of hostilities at the peace talks in Paris. After a heavy bombing campaign against North Vietnam forced a resumption of negotiations, the United States agreed to a cease-fire on 23 January 1973. U.S. forces would withdraw completely from the country within sixty days.

Withdrawal of Troops

The withdrawal of U.S. forces announced by Nixon at the Midway conference began a series of phased, incremental withdrawals of U.S. forces out of Vietnam. At its peak in 1969, U.S. strength in Vietnam was greater than 549,500 troops. Of that number, 368,000 came from the Army. At each step however, the announced reduction did not always equate to an actual withdrawal of individual personnel. Rather than physically remove personnel from Vietnam, the services, in particular the Army, accomplished the removal through a reduction to the number of personnel spaces along with redeployments for specific units. With reduced spaces to fill, fewer

²⁴James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 87.

personnel deployed to Vietnam and the net reduction was therefore achieved through attrition as individuals reached their rotation dates.²⁵

OPERATION KEYSTONE was the name given to the U.S. Army manpower reductions in Vietnam from June 1969 to November 1972. Keystone included fourteen separate iterations; proceeded by a presidential declaration of further reductions to forces in South Vietnam. Each reduction covered the redeployment of personnel and units, redistribution of equipment within the country of Vietnam, including the turnover of equipment to the Vietnamese armed forces. KEYSTONE execution orders also provided disposition instructions for unit equipment to be disposed of locally or redeployed elsewhere in the Army supply system.²⁶

By the end of November 1972, OPERATION KEYSTONE had concluded and only 16,000 Army troops remained in Vietnam. This number held steady until the cease-fire agreement in January 1973. After the cease-fire agreement, the U.S. commitment in Vietnam ended and all U.S. forces were required to leave by March, 1973. Little detailed planning supported this period of evacuation as the final U.S. forces departed from South Vietnam.

Property Accountability

The 9th Infantry Division (ID) was the first large unit to leave Vietnam. Following their redeployment under OPERATION KEYSTONE EAGLE, Headquarters, United States Army in Vietnam (USARV) produced a redeployment guidebook in September 1969 for other units as they left. Lessons learned from Keystone Eagle and other unit redeployments formed the basis for the observations and procedures in the guide. The first identified step for units redeploying from

²⁵MAJ Armando Lujon, MAJ David B. Mendig and CPT Dwight A. Beck, "The U.S. Army in Vietnam 1969-1975: A Study in Macro Force Development" Vietnam Assessment Special Study Project, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1976, 1-2.

²⁶Ibid., 5.

Vietnam was establishing accountability of equipment. Only after gaining positive accountability of all unit equipment could disposition instructions be prepared, and turn-in of items or redeployment actions begin.²⁷

Units in Vietnam retained significant quantities of excess equipment. The majority of this excess was in repair parts, communications and electronics gear, and weapons with some limited excess vehicles. During the early phases of OPERATION KEYSTONE, logisticians began to gain an awareness of the magnitude of the problem created by a lack of property accountability and supply discipline. During the 25th ID redeployment under OPERATION KEYSTONE BRAVO a reconciliation of the division's property accounts identified a significant variance between on hand quantities and recorded inventories at both the unit level as well as in the supporting supply activities.²⁸

The reestablishment of accountability, return of property to the supply system, and resulting distribution actions became an acute problem in 1972 as the number of units leaving and the disposition of large amounts of property began to stress the support system to its maximum capability. Although within USARV the supply system had a property accountability mechanism which allowed for asset visibility, and the ability to control the transfer of equipment to the ARVN, it was not used until late in 1972. Individual units continued to maintain records on equipment loaned to ARVN units that were not reconciled until their redeployment. This lack of real time record keeping frustrated units as they redeployed and added an additional level of required coordination that had to be complete prior to setting final disposition of equipment.²⁹

²⁷Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam, *Redeployment Guide for Units*, 19 September 1969.

²⁸Headquarters, 25th Infantry Division, "After Action Report-Keystone Bravo," 15 December 1970, F-11.

²⁹Headquarters United States Army in Vietnam "After Action Report- USARV

At least one third of all unit property accountability records in Vietnam failed to meet Army standards.³⁰ For unexplained reasons, unit property books often failed to record all property transactions. The greatest errors dealt with on hand quantities of equipment and requisitioned items failing to correlate to items turned in. Because supporting supply units also failed to maintain proper accountability of items, units were able to requisition items they would not otherwise have been authorized as well as items far in excess of what they were to maintain. The lack of trained supply personnel was a key contributor to this problem. While it is difficult to identify specific instances where the system failed, the magnitude of its failure was evident in the final months of Keystone by the voluminous amount of excess equipment processed for turn in.³¹

Operations in Vietnam generated large quantities of excess equipment not documented within the supply system. During the early phases of Keystone, equipment passed from unit to unit without being turning into the supply system. However, as more units redeployed, there were less units to hand items over to. This was a particular challenge for units redeploying without a like unit in their immediate area. These units were then required to dispose of their excess equipment prior to leaving Vietnam. While organizations were encouraged to use the supply system and support activities directed to accept items in “as is” condition, many items were either destroyed or abandoned. As support units redeployed, contractors assumed many functions of the supply system, but without full accountability procedures and less than optimal staffing. As a result, property accountability was a large challenge for units leaving Vietnam and the efficacy of the overall effort was less than desired.³²

Retrograde/Redeployment Operations 1969-1972,” ii-iii.

³⁰Ibid., G-7-1.

³¹Ibid., G-7-1.

³²Ibid., G-3-1.

Echelonning of Support

As forces withdrew from the theater, the U.S. Army in Vietnam and the 1st Logistical Command continually adjusted the sustainment support coverage throughout the country. With the announcement of the Keystone redeployments, 1st Logistical Command established five main hubs to support movements out of Vietnam. These were at Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh Bay, Saigon, and Vung Tau. Each of these locations already housed multiple logistics support units, including maintenance and supply areas and transportation capabilities, primarily supporting I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ) in the north, II CTZ in the Central Highlands, III CTZ in the south around Saigon and IV CTZ in the delta region. Due to their existing use as logistical support areas, these bases required little or no further improvements to support the withdrawal. Thus to the greatest extent possible, the existing support structure in South Vietnam was maximized to support the withdrawal of units rather than create new organizations or support locations.³³

U.S. Army Support Command Da Nang's Example

The experiences in I CTZ, otherwise known as Military Region 1, are indicative of how support was echeloned as U.S. forces withdrew. The U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang (USASUPCOM-DNG) was the Army unit subordinate to the 1st Logistical Command responsible for providing support to Army units in the I CTZ. In 1970, USASUPCOM-DNG operated four support bases throughout its area of operations. Two General Support Groups (the 26th and 80th) provided logistical support throughout the region with their functional companies and battalions. The 5th Transportation Group provided transportation terminal operations at Da Nang, while the U.S. Army Depot, Da Nang provided higher level maintenance and supply support.³⁴

³³Department of the Army, Headquarters 1st Logistical Command "Quarterly Report for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1969" 20 May 1969, R1.

³⁴Department of the Army, Headquarters, United States Army Support Command, Da

In late spring 1971, a reorganization of the support command began in response to the Keystone operations and as redeployment operations began to overtake traditional support missions. By May 1971, retrograde operations had become the largest mission of USASUPCOM-DNG. In order to centralize and streamline the operations required, the support command formed the 92nd Composite Service Battalion with the sole mission of running the retrograde operations at Da Nang. As Keystone progressed and troops left I CTZ, support facilities throughout military region 1 closed and consolidated with the majority of support coming out of Da Nang.³⁵

Simultaneous with the withdrawal of combat troops, logistical units providing support were also subject to Keystone redeployment orders. After the departure of the 101st Airborne Division in January 1972, the USASUPCOM-DNG deactivated its two subordinate General Support Groups. The lack of forces in I CTZ no longer supported their deployment and an ad hoc support relationship of provisional units and re-task organized functional companies replaced their organizations. The Army maintained unit strength in South Vietnam through individual replacements. Provisional units, like the 92 CSB, received personnel from deactivating units that still had time left on the Vietnam tours of duty. However, as these military personnel left and few replacements arrived, a personnel shortage developed within these provisional units. To offset the decreasing amount of soldiers available, the 92nd CSB instituted a local national hiring program in January 1972.³⁶

The lack of habitual support relationship created situations where maintenance companies often supported more than 100 separate company sized units. A lack of knowledge of re-

Nang "Senior Officers Debriefing Report- Colonel H.D. Smith," 27 July 1970, A7-A12.

³⁵Department of the Army, Headquarters, United States Army Support Command, Da Nang "Senior Officers Debriefing Report- MG Arthur H. Sweeney," 10 April 1972. 2-3, 27-34.

³⁶Ibid., 29-30.

organized support structure also led to a loss of accountability for maintenance actions. Units redeploying faced large maintenance issues as equipment destined to be turned in received less than the required level of attention. In February 1972, USASUPCOM-DNG began planning for an expanded maintenance contract for maintenance in I CTZ. Comparing the capabilities of the by then sole remaining maintenance company with those of the contractor it was determined that all maintenance activity could be transferred to the Philco-Ford Company, thus allowing the remaining maintenance company to redeploy. In addition to allowing for the redeployment of another Army unit, the contract also would provide the added benefits of continuity and through a local hiring process, a transfer of skills on maintenance and support to the South Vietnamese.³⁷

After the cease-fire agreement in January 1973, concern on how to continue to provide support to ARVN units became a concern. While a previous attempt to transfer to logistical support capabilities through Vietnamization offered hope; the reality of an end to the U.S. commitment instead a tremendous moment of clarity to the enormity of the support effort. The ARVN was not prepared to execute such a large operation. As such, contracted services became the planned support mechanism for the ARVN after U.S. withdrawal. These contracts continued in many cases until the collapse of Saigon. The U.S. Army, Pacific did not complete a final accounting of these contracts until 1979.³⁸

Reconstitution Efforts

As units redeployed, their property accountability actions identified shortages in their tables of organization and equipment. For units slated to inactivate shortly after their return to the United States, this was not a large issue. However, for units not deactivating, or in some cases

³⁷Ibid., 33-34.

³⁸United States Army Western Command "Termination and Closeout of Southeast Asia Contracts," 29 March 1979, 1-2.

redeploying to Germany, equipment shortages diminished their readiness posture. In these cases, the U.S. Army Pacific directed USARV to fill unit shortages either from depot stocks or from lateral transfers prior to those units' departures from Vietnam. This would ensure that as units moved, they did so with their full complement of equipment, or as few shortages as possible prior to arrival at their next stations of employment.³⁹

While using items identified as excess during the redeployment process to fill shortages made sense, it did complicate matters and slowed movements. Further complicating this process was a similar use of identified excess to ship to other countries units, such as Thailand. The Keystone architecture was designed to rapidly move U.S. forces out of Vietnam. Unit equipment and property organic to those formations would move with them. As Keystone operation centers became increasingly tasked to support Vietnam-wide redistribution efforts their effectiveness diminished. This degradation in effectiveness was because the same processes that redeployed units would then have to be duplicated to move equipment and supplies to third parties. In addition, the redeployment operations centers were not configured to act as depots and had no personnel assigned to store and issue equipment. Without augmentation, and with a diminishing work force, this effort only served to complicate the process of removing U.S. forces from Southeast Asia.⁴⁰

While the difficulties encountered should not be minimized, the sheer volume of material returned to CONUS or disposed of in Vietnam through transfer to ARVN units, sale or demilitarization, speaks to the efficacy of the operations. A contemporary writer for the Army's professional logistics bulletin remarked in 1972 that "Army logisticians have recorded an

³⁹Headquarters United States Army in Vietnam "After Action Report- USARV Retrograde/Redeployment Operations 1969-1972," iii.

⁴⁰ Ibid., G-2-4.

impressive achievement with the retrograde and disposal of nearly two million tons of material from Vietnam.”⁴¹

The ARVN was not the sole beneficiary from the redistribution of equipment used in Vietnam. The withdrawal of forces from Vietnam also had a direct benefit to reserve component forces. Specific improvements focused on a redistribution of weapon systems. According to Heiser,

The phasedown of U.S. operations in Southeast Asia permitted an accelerated delivery of equipment to the Reserve Components... principal deliveries during fiscal year 1970 included a significant number of new tactical vehicles and radios, sufficient M14 and M16 rifles to permit the complete modernization of the Reserve Component rifle inventory.”⁴²

Summary

The American withdrawal from Vietnam was a complicated process that evolved over time. As the pace of the exit intensified, so too did the challenges associated with the removal of such large quantities of equipment from the theater. The amount of equipment improperly accounted for throughout the war compounded the difficulty of evacuating the equipment or disposing of it properly. As such, many items simply disappeared from the Army inventory, resulting in a waste of resources. Items that did return to the Army supply system supported reconstitution efforts for units withdrawing from Vietnam along with others across the active component. These items also supported modernization efforts for the reserve component.

While chaotic, the exit from Vietnam established a way to leave a theater after a lengthy conflict. Due partly to an individual replacement policy, supply discipline was lax. Individuals, and units by extension, did not maintain property accountability of Army property. This created a

⁴¹Lieutenant Colonel Arthur T. Buswell, “Disposal Operations—Vietnam” *Army Logistician* vol. 5 no. 3, May-Jun 1973.

⁴²Lieutenant General Joseph M. Heiser, Jr., *Logistics Support* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1991), 254.

lack of visibility for planners as they attempted to support the withdrawal. Only by anticipating requirements did logisticians place the appropriate level of support where needed.

WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ

Background of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Beginning in October 2001, the United States waged a campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Osama Bin Laden, leader of Al Qaeda and mastermind of the September 11th attacks, remained unaccounted for. Special operations and light infantry units of the Army, with substantial air support from the Air Force and Navy, continued to press counter-terrorist operations but the heavy armored forces remained “on the bench,” largely uncommitted. That would soon change.

In November 2001, President George W. Bush began questioning the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, on the military’s ability to attack Iraq, but refrained from any public discourse on the subject. While the President could foresee a campaign against Iraq, he was not ready to begin discussions on expanding the war on terror. However, just a few months later he would begin laying that groundwork.⁴³ In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush identified a national objective of carrying the war against terrorism beyond Afghanistan. He specifically named North Korea, Iraq and Iraq, describing their involvement with terrorism as an “axis of evil.”⁴⁴ Military planners had already begun the detailed planning necessary to invade Iraq, including the movements of thousands of pieces of equipment.

The United States Army went to war with Iraq in March 2003 after nearly a year of military planning and political maneuvering. Conventional wisdom espoused that this operation

⁴³Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2004),1-4, 8.

⁴⁴George W. Bush Presidential Library, “President Delivers State of the Union Address” Archived White House Website <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> (accessed 24 November 2012).

would be a repeat of OPERATION DESERT STORM, twelve years before. Both sides even remained outfitted with similar uniforms and equipment. Young officers across the force began referring to their deployments as Gulf War II, in deference to their fathers and older brothers. The challenge that lay ahead was beyond their wildest expectations, and one that would test their generation in the military.

Unlike the swift victory of twelve years prior, the troops on the ground in 2003 did not encounter large-scale units executing a well-prepared defense. This time, Iraqi soldiers simply disappeared and offered limited or light resistance on the approach march to Baghdad, defying all intelligence estimates. A new threat emerged with the proliferation and efficacy of irregular forces encountered by V Corps and the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF). While these irregular threats failed to stop ground operations, their impact and ability to inflict casualties foreshadowed the changing battlefield presented by this first war of the twenty-first century.⁴⁵

The insertion of the 173rd Airborne Brigade into northern Iraq, as a replacement for the 4th Infantry Division after Turkey would not allow that unit to attack through their country, led to the rapid disintegration of Iraqi units in the north.⁴⁶ As the V Corps and I MEF approached Baghdad, Iraqi resistance in the city stiffened but ultimately succumbed to the weight of the heavy forces as they raced through the city and into the heart of the government sector. With the fall of its capital, Saddam Hussein's regime collapsed. Coalition forces began a lengthy occupation of Iraq.

Despite recommendations from the Chief of Staff of the Army General Eric Shinseki for large numbers of ground forces, Rumsfeld insisted on using the least amount of forces possible

⁴⁵COL Gregory Fontenot, LTC E.J. Degean, LTC David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Combat Studies Institute Press: Fort Leavenworth, 2004), 102.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 230.

during the initial invasion and in the post-war occupation of Iraq. This was in line with his championing of a transformation in military affairs since assuming office in 2001. Rumsfeld insisted on military options that were faster, lighter and more synergistic of joint effects. Beginning in May 2003, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) began directing units in Iraq to plan for a short period of stability operations, followed by a withdrawal in September of that year. Later arriving forces would assume the mission of securing Iraq under a Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) until a new civilian government could be established. V Corps would remain in Iraq as Coalition Joint Task Force-7 with the purpose of restoring order and setting the conditions for a transition to a new civilian government. CJTF-7 divided Iraq into six areas of responsibility, each assigned to a division headquarters to control.⁴⁷

The initial laurels of victory soon revealed the more difficult issues of occupation. The civilian director of the CPA, Paul Bremmer, set about disbanding the Iraqi Army and pursuing a policy whereby no former regime member could participate in the future Iraq government. With the Iraqi Army no longer in existence, CTJF-7 became the only functioning means of government available to the CPA. Tensions between former members of the Iraqi Army and the CPA grew exponentially. After weeks of waiting for progress, tensions came to a head. Coalition force vehicles moving throughout the city began taking fire. On May 20, 2003 a satchel charge detonated underneath a High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) traveling between the Baghdad Airport and the central government sector killing one of the occupants. The explosion carved a scar on the face of the American experience in Iraq.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Donald P. Wright and COL Timothy R. Reese, *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom May 2003-January 2005* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008) 27-29.

⁴⁸Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2006), 206.

As the situation on the ground became more violent, force levels and force structure requirements increased. The large numbers of M1 tanks and M2 infantry fighting vehicles that quickly maneuvered through the Iraq desert in the initial march to Baghdad, hindered mobility throughout urban areas and stability operations. CJTF-7 leaders saw that additional forces would be required to deal with the growing violence. As more troops began to arrive into theater the Headquarters, Department of the Army, foreseeing an ongoing requirement for forces into the future, announced a one-year “boots on the ground” policy that limited individual units time in Iraq to no more than 365 days.⁴⁹

In an attempt to better control operations in Iraq CENTCOM replaced CJTF-7 with two organizations in 2004. Multinational Force- Iraq (MNF-I) was a headquarters formed to provide strategic and operational-level command of all U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. MNC-I was a corps-level headquarters, subordinate to MNF-I, focused on tactical war fighting. MNF-I also had another subordinate headquarters focused on rebuilding the Iraqi military and security systems.⁵⁰

From 2004-2006 Coalition force levels grew to over 180,000 as violence continued to permeate the country. In February 2006, Sunni extremists attacked a mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest sites in Shiite Islam. This action initiated a spiraling level of violence between the sects and threatened the country with civil war. In Baghdad, Shiite militias began a pattern of ethnic cleansing, forcing out families. Sunnis retaliated with massive car bombs targeting Shiite populations in public places.⁵¹

⁴⁹Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 165-168.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 171-173.

⁵¹David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2009), 222-223.

In December 2006, after suffering a loss in the midterm congressional elections, President Bush began looking for a new strategy in Iraq, one that would secure the population and bring an end to the sectarian violence. The process of training the new Iraqi Security Forces moved painfully slowly and was not producing desired effects. While the long term solution to Iraq remained unresolved without security, any hope for progress was fleeting. In order to give the Iraqi government that much needed space and time, Bush ordered a surge in military forces that increased the number of U.S. forces in Iraq by an additional 20,000 troops.⁵²

The surge of forces into Iraq was the high water mark of U.S. involvement. Spaced over the course of two years and coupled with an extension in place of forces in Iraq for an additional three months, the 20,000 additional troops began to flow into Iraq in early 2007. The additional forces remained until mid-2008. In November of 2008, the U.S. signed a new security agreement with the government of Iraq. The agreement specified the a new construct for U.S. operations Iraq, limiting the ability of U.S. force to act unilaterally and also set a date for a withdrawal of U.S. forces in the country. All U.S. forces would leave by December 2011.⁵³

The size and scope of withdrawing from Iraq was daunting. Along with withdrawing all the U.S. personnel from Iraq, the drawdown would require the closure or transition of 341 bases, and the retrograde or disposal of 1.7 million pieces of equipment, 40,000 vehicles and over 60,000 containers. Further complicating matters was the presence of over 125,000 contractors, many of whom operated government owned equipment. It was the largest retrograde of equipment since the Vietnam War.⁵⁴

⁵²Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 100-104.

⁵³United States Forces-Iraq, *Base Closure in the IJOA*, August 17, 2010, 11.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

The situation in Iraq was in many ways more complicated than the one at the end of the Vietnam War due to the increased use of contractors to support U.S. forces. The 1991 victory over Iraq in Operation Desert Storm created euphoria within the defense establishment in the United States. This swift, sudden victory coupled with the demise of the Soviet Union led the nation to exact a peace dividend from its expansive military establishment. Without a new threat and with a demonstrated military dominance, the Department of Defense began a drawdown of all services and in particular, the Army. By 1993, end strength had been reduced from 780,000 to 500,000 soldiers. In the reshaping that followed, five divisions along with the VII Corps, deactivated, along with numerous logistics and other enabling units.⁵⁵

Because of these disbanded units, civilian businesses now provide many logistics functions through a contract in place of lost army capabilities. In Iraq, more than 100,000 civilian contractors, both U.S. and third country nationals, supported combat operations. While the redeployment of those individuals was the responsibility of their companies, in most cases the contracts involved government furnished equipment (GFE). These items were government property, operated and maintained by contractors, to support U.S. forces. At the termination of a contract, the equipment was then returned to U.S. control. While theoretically accounted for on unit property books, the actual accountability of these items was less far less than required. As units rotated out of theater, GFE property regularly moved across TPE accounts and accountability lost through poor procedures at the small unit ad user level. As contracts expired and the equipment physically returned to army units, the lack of visibility for these items created an unforeseen requirement to dispose of the items or retrograde them out of the theater.

The plan to withdraw all personnel and equipment from Iraq was called the Responsible Drawdown of Forces and the order to begin execution was issued in 2009. With the departure of

⁵⁵Fontenot, Degen, and Thon, *On Point*, 5-6.

the last international component, MNF-I was designated as United States Forces Iraq (USFI) in July 2009. By January 2010, U.S. forces were reduced to 121,000 (from a peak of 169,000). The final phase of U.S. involvement in Iraq, OPERATION NEW DAWN, began in September 2010 with less than 50,000 troops. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM terminated and OPERATION NEW DAWN took its place as the framework order that would carry USF-I through its departure from Iraq. With the end of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, U.S. combat operations in Iraq also ended and remaining U.S. forces assumed an advise and assist mission.⁵⁶

For the next eighteen months, U.S. forces adjusted to their new role as advisors and trainers to Iraqi forces. As time progressed, ISF units increasingly took the lead for security operations while U.S. forces provided support and technical assistance. Despite political efforts to secure a status of forces agreement for U.S. force to remain in Iraq beyond the original December 2011 date, the Iraq government did not agree to an extension. U.S. forces officially completed their withdrawal on December 18, 2011.⁵⁷

Property Accountability Efforts

As units began to withdraw the issue of base closures brought forward the challenges associated with leaving at the micro-level. Property controlled by U.S. Army units consisted of three types: unit equipment, theater provided equipment (TPE) and real property (buildings and real-estate). Unlike the Vietnam withdrawal, entire units rotated into and out of theater instead of individual soldiers. As these units switched out, they deployed and redeployed with their

⁵⁶Greg Jaffe “War in Iraq Will be Called “Operation New Dawn” to Reflect Reduced U.S. Role,” *Washington Post*, Feb 19, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/18/AR2010021805888.html> (accessed November 25, 2012).

⁵⁷Richard Engel “The War is Over: Last US Soldiers Leave Iraq”, NBC News, 18 December 2011, http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2011/12/17/9528197-the-war-is-over-last-us-soldiers-leave-iraq (Accessed November 25, 2012).

individual and unit equipment. TPE and real property remained in Iraq. Under the specifications of the new security agreement, all real property would transfer to the Government of Iraq on the withdrawal of U.S. forces. The sheer volume of remaining equipment would be cost prohibitive to return it in total to the United States.⁵⁸

MNF-I established two standards for property transactions related to leaving a base: base closings and base returns. Under a base closing standard, U.S. forces evacuated all property and personnel from the area. Base closings allowed no residual presence. A base return standard transferred ownership of the physical location to the Iraqi government. In those instances, U.S. government property could transfer to the Iraqi government so long as the transaction followed the foreign excess personal property process. As MNF-I notified units of base closure decisions; those units would verify property inventory records and then coordinate with the MNF-I staff office for logistics (J4) for disposition instructions; directing movement of property to another location, or allowing the items to be transferred to the Iraqi government.⁵⁹

Department of the Army Efforts to Affect Property Accountability

Similar to the situation faced during the withdrawal from Vietnam, gaining accountability of the property was the first step to understanding the challenges associated with redeploying forces. In July 2009, Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) issued execution order (EXORD) 09-01, *Responsible Drawdown of Forces in Iraq*. The order detailed unit responsibilities on resetting and reconstituting the Army. It identified specific items as automatic reset inductions, those items that without inspection would be sent directly to an Army depot for sustainment level maintenance reset, an example of which is M1 tanks. The order also specified

⁵⁸United States Forces-Iraq, *Base Closure in the IJOA*, August 17, 2010., 18.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 46.

two other groups of equipment, intensively managed items (items of particular interest due to their sensitive nature such as communications-electronic devices and small arms weapons) that would receive original equipment manufacturer or national level maintenance, and medical sustainment items that were clinically significant and demanded specific management of their reset. Establishing property accountability, down to the small unit level, was a critical component of withdrawing forces.⁶⁰

The initial order was limited in its success as evidenced by the establishment of a campaign on property accountability the following year. EXORD 259-10, published in July 2010, emphasized again the need for establishing property accountability but recognized that due to the number of units that had rotated through the Iraq Theater, an unprecedented amount of equipment was always in motion throughout the Army. Compounding the difficulty of the effort was a newly announced surge of forces into Afghanistan. The intent therefore was to reestablish not only the property accountability system, but a culture of supply discipline that would enhance overall Army readiness.⁶¹

Theater Provided Equipment (TPE)

By 2008, roughly eighty percent of the equipment in Iraq was theater provided, equipment that units took charge of once they arrived in Iraq, totaling 143,000 items worth more than \$16 .5 billion. An impressive figure but problematic, as units using these items claimed no more than temporary ownership. Units largely maintained good accountability of their organic property- equipment the unit deployed with and planned to return to home station. TPE had many

⁶⁰Department of the Army, HQDA Execution Order *EXORD 09-01 For Responsible Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Iraq*, July 7, 2009.

⁶¹Department of the Army, ALARACT 210/2010 Subject: EXORD 259-10 Campaign on Property Accountability, July 9, 2010.

sources including equipment directed to stay behind from previous units, items drawn from Army pre-positioned stocks. Also required to stay was equipment purchased while in theater. MNF-I purchasing rules required equipment acquired with overseas contingency operation (OCO) funds had to stay within the theater of operations. As forces began to redeploy, TPE was often overlooked or forgotten.⁶²

In 2010, following the designation of MNF-I to United States Forces-Iraq (USF-I), USF-I HQ and 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) (ESC), the senior logistics headquarters in Iraq, implemented OPERATION CLEAN SWEEP. Using mobile redistribution teams, the operation assisted units with turn in of non-mission essential unit excess supplies and equipment in order to expedite the retrograde process in support of the withdrawal of U.S. forces. OPERATION CLEAN SWEEP resulted in the return of over \$1.1 billion in supplies to the Army supply system and the movement out of theater of approximately 20,000 shipping containers.⁶³

Echelonning of Support

Use of Kuwait as an Intermediate Staging Base

The ability to utilize Kuwait as a regional Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) provided as many benefits to forces redeploying as to forces attacking into Iraq in 2003. The 1st Theater Support Command, senior logistics headquarters for U.S. Army Central, was located at Camp Arifjjan, Kuwait. Throughout the U.S. mission in Iraq, support continued to flow through Kuwait into Iraq through a series of transportation networks, both military and contracted. Beginning in 2008, this transportation network began working to support retrograde operations, initially

⁶²Colonel Michael A. Armstead :”The Retrograde of United States Military Equipment out of Iraq”, (Strategy Research Project, United States Army War College, 200), 4-5.

⁶³United States Army Audit Agency “Follow Up Audit of Retrograde Operations Southwest Asia- Multi-Class Iraq Project A-2010-ALL-2060.000 Report A-2011-ALL,”14 April 2011, 16-17.

utilizing back-haul movements and later dedicated transportation missions headed south to the ports of embarkation in Kuwait.

The 1st TSC maintained a sustainment brigade in Kuwait as part of its force structure to conduct theater distribution, which is a doctrinal mission for a sustainment brigade. As forces began to withdraw from Iraq, this mission transitioned to theater retrograde operations. An ESC, located at Logistics Support Area Anaconda, in Balad, Iraq continued to focus on theater sustainment. The ESC at Balad managed retrograde planning and synchronization of efforts with 1st TSC assets in Kuwait. The ESC also executed contracts for movement of equipment within Iraq as forces repositioned.

Effect of Modular Force Structure on Logistics Support

As U.S. forces left Iraq, the logistical benefits of the Army's transition to a modular force structure became apparent. The goal of modularity was to add capabilities the brigade that would make them self-sufficient in fires, intelligence, signal and engineering functions. With each brigade incorporating its own support battalion organically, combat forces now owned the ability to sustain themselves. A sustainment brigade providing theater distribution would then provide additional logistical support to meet requirements exceeding the internal capability of the brigade's organic support battalion. The withdrawal from Iraq tested the modularity system and it performed as designed. As the forces structure decreased in Iraq and forces redeployed, the 3rd Sustainment Brigade (SB) assumed sole responsibility for sustaining forces in Iraq. Through a mixture of military and contracted deliveries, all sustainment continued to flow uninterrupted to forces remaining in Iraq. As 3rd SB forces began redeploying, the 1st SB in Kuwait assumed responsibility for providing throughput distribution to units in Iraq that exceeded the 3rd SB capability to support.

The ability of sustainment brigades to operate multiple task organized functional and multifunctional support organizations allowed logistical planners to easily configure sustainment

support to changing conditions. By design, sustainment brigades have no organic units. All subordinate units of sustainment brigades are task organized to support specific missions. This provides logistic commanders flexibility to array support as needed. In the case of the Iraq withdrawal, it allowed a sustainment brigade in Kuwait to assume responsibility for support requirements in Iraq as the force structure drew down.⁶⁴

Reconstitution of Forces

As the withdrawal from Iraq began in 2008 the Chief of Staff of the Army, General George Casey, gave orders to the U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC) to implement reconstitution actions across the Army in the quickest time possible. To achieve this mission, AMC created two sub-organizations; a forward command post collocated with U.S. Army Central in Arifjjan, Kuwait, and a Responsible Reset Task Force (R2TF). These new entities collectively provided the visibility of equipment coming out of theater early enough to affect shipping directions and begin induction into sustainment maintenance actions at the Army's depots. Granting R2TF the authority to make decision on where an item would go, either to disposal or to a specific level of maintenance, allowed AMC to begin resetting the Army's equipment stocks before they even left theater. Essentially this deployed headquarters connected the depots to the end users far forward in the Iraqi theater.⁶⁵

While AMC executed the process, they did so under the direction of Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) guidance. The HQDA Deputy Chief of Staff for Resource Management G-8 established a retrograde, RESET, redistribution priority list, synchronized with

⁶⁴BG Gutsave F. Perna, "Sustaining the Responsible Drawdown of Forces" *Army Sustainment* (March-April 2011), 9-10.

⁶⁵CASCOM Directorate of Lessons Learned and Center for Army Lessons Learned, "R-CATT Series Army Materiel Command Operation New Dawn Retrograde and Reset Lessons Learned AAR Presentation and Transcript," vol 35, May 2012, 27.

the Army's needs, in order to set priorities for the depots. This prioritization allowed depots to order the right repair parts, configure maintenance lines, and set production schedules that would repair items in accordance with the Army's priorities and directives.⁶⁶

The R2TF's mission was to ensure the rapid return, repair, redistribution, and disposal of equipment to regenerate combat power for the U.S. Army. R2TF provided an unprecedented enabler to the reconstitution effort. It provided a blending of strategic and operational skills in maintenance, supply, and transportation along with operational research and modeling capabilities. This allowed AMC to interface directly with supported units and the national strategic resources to develop and execute detailed reset plans. Separate from the joint and theater army chain of command, R2TF as a separate command of AMC was positioned to synchronize the efforts of multiple agencies in order to maximize the effect on the total Army.⁶⁷

R2TF had great authority on determining where to repair equipment. If an item met the criteria for national level reset, R2TF generated the shipping documentation and coordinated evacuation. However, if the item was capable of being repaired locally, R2TF leveraged existing maintenance capabilities, either local national contracted or forward deployed national assets in the theater, to repair the equipment and return it to theater supply stocks. Having this intermediate capability made an immediate and positive impact on U.S. Army Central. More than fifty percent of the equipment leaving Iraq went to support the surge in Afghanistan.⁶⁸

Gaining visibility on the total of all items exiting theater was the first challenge to reconstituting the forces. Once the supply system had visibility of the items, managers could then make disposition instructions across the Army. While still in Iraq, the TPE equipment accounts

⁶⁶Ibid., 28.

⁶⁷Ibid., 59-60.

⁶⁸Ibid., 59.

did not merge with unit or installation property accounts. In March 2011 the Secretary of the Army, John McHugh, established the Logistics Support Agency (LOGSA) as the lead materiel integrator for the Army, in charge of equipment redistribution across the force. LOGSA's Logistics Information Warehouse (LIW) computer database integration system would be the single authoritative location for all logistics data. This was important due to the proliferation of accounting and management systems across the army that often generated conflicting status reports on the location and maintenance status of equipment.⁶⁹

Having a single database allowed development of a decision support tool utilizing all collected and annotated data. Updated with Army Force Generation requirements and balanced against Department of the Army master priority lists, the tool provided managers recommended sourcing solutions for Army equipment shortages. As units returned from theater and required new equipment either due to a mission change or reconfiguration, LOGSA's decision support tool provided recommended solutions on how to fill identified equipment shortages. These solutions came from both excess equipment in other units, and from the production schedules of Army depots conducting reset maintenance actions R2TF used these enablers to make great impacts on the speed of reconstitution efforts. The time spent executing the redistribution processing reduced from eighteen days to five. Time spent at the brigade level and below executing property transactions reduced by fifty percent.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Ibid., 42.

⁷⁰Ibid., 44-47.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The examples of the U.S. experiences in Vietnam and Iraq illustrate the challenges associated with conducting a withdrawal from a theater after a long duration campaign. While technological innovations have improved the ability to provide better visibility of movements and aid in planning retrograde operations and reconstitution efforts, the tasks associated with a successful withdrawal remain daunting and require thorough preparation. Planners at the operational level must recognize that planning for a withdrawal of forces must involve more than just the logisticians in an organization. As the last phase of operations, commanders and their staffs must recognize that how the force withdraws, and how it is postured for future operations, is a critical component of a well-executed campaign.

Summary

This study identified three essential elements to redeploying a force after extended operations. They are establishing property accountability, echeloning of sustainment support, and reconstituting the force. These three elements combined form a system for logistical withdrawal that is essential to ensuring future readiness of the army. Figure 1 below illustrates how this system is related. The components of this system remain fixed regardless of the size of the force employed or the length of operations. The actions required to execute a withdrawal of forces may be conducted both during hostilities and after implementation of a cease-fire.

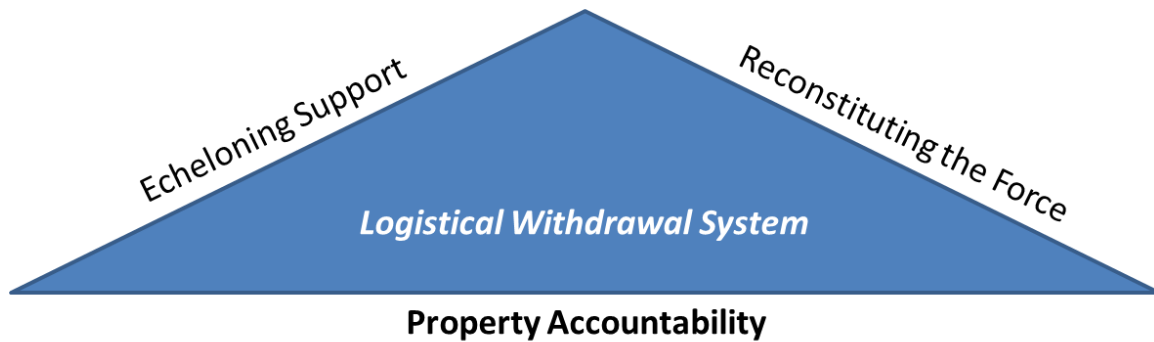


Figure 1- System of Logistical withdrawals.

Property Accountability

Establishing property accountability is the first element and has a direct impact on the other two. It is the base of the system upon which the other two elements depend for support. In order to understand the magnitude of a withdrawal a force must have accurate data on the total amount of equipment within its formations. Only with this understanding can the staff help the commander visualize the process to move equipment out of a theater and then describe how it will be executed. The detailed planning generated by working out the components of this vision will lead to a thorough order directing how the process will flow.

Modern technology continues to help refine the commander's understanding of his forces readiness. The common operating picture developed by LOGSA will continue to develop and provide unparalleled visibility for leaders from the Pentagon to battalion and company level managing withdrawal operations. This visibility is still contingent on small unit leaders ensuring that all equipment is properly accounted for in the Army supply system and not maintained in an "off the books" status. Having excess equipment may seem in many cases desirable. It can be a hedge against an uncertain supply system and provide options for a commander not provided by a unit's normal table of organization and equipment. However, by restoring discipline to the army supply system resources can be better aligned to support forces as they withdraw. Without accurate information to support the other two components of the system identified in this study,

echeloning of sustainment support and reconstitution efforts, efforts will be wasted or not robust enough to support the withdrawal.

Echeloning of Sustainment Support

Units will require sustainment during their movements out of a theater and the echeloning of this support is necessary to ensure seamless logistics support until they leave. When executing a withdrawal through an ISB like Kuwait, the challenges associated with the provisioning of sustainment may be less complicated. When executing a withdrawal while simultaneously conducting combat operations, contracted support may not be a viable option. Even if available, the associated costs may be prohibitive due to the level of violence in a theater. Failing to properly support a unit as it transits out of a theater leaves the unit in a degraded state of readiness once it reaches its next destination.

Modularity provides a direct support logistics structures inherent in most brigade formations under. Nevertheless, these organizations still require an echelon above brigade sustainment structure to support them as they withdraw. This condition is similar to normal operations. The challenge for theater planners is to correctly anticipate the needs of units as they redeploy and ensure that required support is provisioned and allocated at the critical times and places. This may be at the port as organic support units lose their capability to provide support or at some point short of that where consumption rates overcome the ability to resupply organic units due to degraded capability.

While most units gained increased logistics capabilities under modularity, not all force structures include such robust internal sustainment. Planners must also account for units without organic logistical support and small units without a parent brigade. In these cases logistics support from theater assets will be the only sustainment available. When planning how a force will exit a theater, special care must be provided to ensure that full logistics capabilities are provided to all units that remain within the area of operations.

Reconstitution of Units

Reconstitution efforts must begin while deployed. Unit level maintenance can offset, but not entirely defray, the impact of continuous operations on Army equipment. The fact remains that in a deployed theater, equipment will see increased wear, especially on critical components and those susceptible to harsh environments. The introduction of a forward command post from AMC to Iraq is a model for how to expedite the process of inducting equipment into national reset programs. Placing subject matter experts into a theater with the authority to induct or defer individual pieces of equipment into a reset process prior to these items beginning movement to CONUS repair sites saves time on an exponential basis. The alternative of shipping these items to a central receiving point for further determination or to home station for sorting and distribution represents an industrial age process. Information age systems available to logisticians today have overcome this inefficiency.

Recommendations

Doctrine

ADP 4-0 and *ADRP 4-0* do not sufficiently address the complexity of tasks associated with the issue of redeploying forces while conducting operations. While these doctrinal publications do specify actions required when forces completely leave a theater such as the termination of contracts and removal of forces, they fail to address the needs of forces redeploying from those areas. Theater closing must not then be viewed through the singular lens of simply moving out of a theater. Special care must be addressed on how to remove forces in such a way as they can be quickly reconstituted and made ready for other missions. The United States Army Combined Support Command (CASCOM) should develop an Army Tactics and Techniques Publication (ATTP) subordinate to *ADP 4-0* and *ADRP 4-0*, that details how to conduct force withdrawals utilizing the elements laid out in this study.

Property Accountability

Maintaining property accountability is far easier than reestablishing it once lost. Leaders and property managers across the Army expended countless hours attempting to reestablish supply discipline and ownership of equipment both in Vietnam and in Iraq. Maintaining property accountability is the responsibility of company commanders as primary hand receipt holders. The procedures for maintaining accountability of army property are clearly established in *Army Regulation 735-5 Policies and Procedures for Property Accountability* and are applicable both in garrison and while deployed. Unit commanders must ensure that personnel under their charge, either soldiers, Department of the Army civilians, or contractors, execute their responsibility to maintain government property. Higher-level commanders must supervise the execution of the property accountability system and ensure that subordinate commanders are appropriately resourced to meet their responsibilities.

The use of TPE as a sourcing solution was necessary in Iraq in order to meet the equipping needs of units operating in that theater. While originally designed to simplify the logistics of deploying units by reducing the amount of equipment shipped into and out of the theater of operations, the use of TPE created additional challenges. The accounting for TPE on separate property books led to a breakdown in supply discipline. Too often, TPE did not receive the same level of care and attention as unit equipment from home stations, mostly from the failure to recognize TPE as unit equipment in the same way as organizational property deployed with the unit from their home stations. In future operations and property handed from one unit to another should be transferred to existing property books. These items then fall into the care and custody of the using unit and are accounted for by the brigade property book officer. Maintaining separate property books for TPE and unit equipment is duplicitous and unnecessary.

Excess equipment must be quickly identified and retrograded from a theater of operations. Maintaining visibility of excess equipment is far easier given the technological

solutions available to property managers. The assets visibility provided by LOGSA enables commanders to quickly see where equipment is needed and make informed decisions on how to resource units. When theater demands require the retention of excess equipment, the Army Field Support Brigades must maintain control of these items in the same manner as pre-positioned stocks. In this way, the equipment will be accounted for and maintained in a high state of readiness until it is issued to a using unit.

Contractors provided government equipment must be required to account for that property using standard army information systems. When contractors use proprietary systems to account for equipment in their charge, property managers lose visibility of these items. Gaining access to that information for property managers requires a cumbersome process of working through contracting offices and potential modifications to contracts. Without visibility, logisticians lose the ability to forecast sustainment requirements during withdrawal and the ability to recommend sourcing solutions for reconstitution efforts. Future contracts must be written such that they require all entities performing services for the army, controlling government equipment, to utilize army property accountability systems. Also contractors provided government equipment must be held financially liable for such equipment to the same standards as units.

Echeloning of support

As forces withdraw from a theater, the TSC is responsible to ensure that it provides adequate logistics support. This support may be provided either through Army units task organized under a Combat Sustainment Support Battalion in a Sustainment Brigade, or provided by contracted means. The use of an ISB may allow TSCs to push support forward into an area of operations while reducing the overall logistics footprint. Factors such as tactical risk may force commanders to consider non-traditional support arraignments in order to provide the correct level of security forces.

While making recommendations on how to support forces redeploying, planners must account for the risk to logistics forces. Ideally, sustainment forces would be the last element to leave a theater after conducting theater closing tasks. In a contested area, however, this may not be possible. While logistics units maintain the ability to defend themselves against some threats, commanders may wish to augment them with additional maneuver forces to mitigate specific risks. In this case, planners must allocate appropriate level of sustainment for all forces as necessary.

Reconstitution of Forces

Extended operations degrade the effectiveness of units. The purpose of reconstitution is to return those units to a high state of material readiness so that they may continue operations. Successful reconstitution ensures a pool of ready forces to the Army. Reconstitution begins in the theater of operation. As excess materiel is accumulated in a theater, it must be used to fill unit shortages. A theater redistribution process can serve as an alternate source of supply to normal requisition routes. Sustainment Brigades possess the material management oversight capability to establish and run these processes. Once established, referral tables within current Standard Army Management Information Systems (STAMIS) processes will allow redistribution sites to serve as the first source of supply before passing a requisition for fill at a higher level. However this is only possible once excess materiel is identified, accountability reestablished, and items are entered into supply databases for visibility.

Conclusion

The removal of forces from a theater can be accomplished in a way that minimizes the disruption on units and maintains overall readiness. The methods demonstrated during the withdrawal from Vietnam and later improved during the withdrawal from Iraq indicate that it is possible. While the lack of visibility and proper record keeping hampered the efforts to move

equipment out of Vietnam, logisticians moved tremendous amounts of materiel out of the country. Units throughout the army put this materiel to use during reconstitution. During the Vietnam withdrawal, excess items were the first source of supply to fill shortages as unit redeployed, therefore maximizing efforts to improve unit readiness.

The provisioning of sustainment and reconstitution of forces in order to provide operational commanders forces in a state of readiness to conduct operations is the charge of logisticians. However, the responsibility to sustain a force resides with the commander. The commander's staff, therefore, must recognize this responsibility and ensure that sustaining operations are planned for and synchronized at every level with the operational plan. The commander, as a steward of army resources, must also recognize his responsibility to return forces to the army in the greatest state of readiness possible. To accomplish this he must design his campaigns to include the provisioning of logistics to forces as they transition into and out of theater. At the conclusion of his campaign, the commander must also see that the theater is closed and all government resources returned to the supply system in order to continue reconstitution efforts across the army.

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